

First Parish Church

Date: October 23, 2018

Present: Becky Fleury, Treasurer; Cathy Zylinski, Personnel; Reni Harnden, Member-At-Large; Joe Weaver, Missions; Pastor Deborah Roof; Margie Ives, Stewardship; Anne LaDuke; Assistant Moderator; Harry Handy, Diaconate; Dee Deranian, Facilities; Cathy Pottle; Anne Marie Merrill, Christian Ed, John Bartel, Member – at – Large.

Guests: Allen Pawl; Beth Hunter; Nancy Murdock; Ken Gould; Karen Wilson

Opening: Pastor Deborah

Minutes:

1. **New Agenda Item :**

Karen Wilson proposed a “Breakfast with Santa” – She could not find another breakfast w/ Santa in Derry. Motion by Becky, second by Linda all in favor to have “Breakfast with Santa on December 8th.”

2. **Financials:** Becky reviewed the balance sheets

Balance Sheet Analysis: Some Capital Campaign funds coming in. Adequate to fund the interest payments due.

Balance Sheet:

Nothing new or particularly interesting on the balance sheet. Line item for tower rehab recently sent in and will show in next month.

Income & Expense Reports:

Actual Income & Expenses: Bottom line end of Sept. (\$4,757.41). But should be ok at the end of the year. Pledge is a little low – YTD @ \$143,800. Income ok; Expenses are a bit low. Still have Harvest Supper and Sugar Plum Fair to come in. Motion to accept by Cathy Z., second by Joe and all in favor.

3. **Budget Review:**

Draft budget presented; major updates – Pastor Salary not increased; Health & Dental increased by 2%; Expense –line item number 5111 – Sabbatical coverage will be needed. Personnel requested 1 month leave. Raises recommended for administrative staff by 3% and increase hours to 30; 3% for CE Director & Accompanist. Level funding from last year. 238K is bottom line budget as currently presented. Loan payments 5545 – starting August 2019 – loan converts to an actual Mortgage – interest & principal payments. Fred proposed to move line items – interest payments & sabbatical to the bottom of the budget. Pastor Deborah suggests that in lieu of her signing the stewardship letter should someone else? Perhaps it should be signed with the stewardship board? Anne states the congregation is waiting to see what are we going to do differently? Anne Marie suggests a letter comes from either Council stressing that this is OUR Church.

4. **Budget Meeting** Planning: Sunday after Church Becky will be there and Fred would like to see Council members present.

5. **Recall Meeting Results:**

John feels the result of the vote indicates this congregation feels the church is going in the right direction. We want Pastor Deborah to stay and we like what she is doing. We need to change the By-laws to be very specific to what constitutes firing/recall.

Linda saw a lot of hurt and anger. We need to reach out to many who are hurting. Linda agrees we need to review the by-laws.

Becky – not an easy meeting to manage – Fred did a great job. Becky doesn't feel it was a vote of confidence. But we need to change but she doesn't know where to start. Doesn't feel the by-laws need to change. It provides the Congregation with some power but should only be used when all other methods fail. Fred adds the Reverend Rankin offered his assistance.

Cathy – Grateful other pastors were there in support of Pastor Deborah. Sad that the people new to the Church didn't realize what was going on. At the same time happy there were so many new members present.

Anne Marie – Spent time processing the meeting. Surprised that a lot of the people involved in the issues 2 years ago did not get up and speak. Believe the by-laws need revision. Also notice many members who were not active in the church community who voted. Spoke w/ associate conference minister. Anne Marie suggests Rev Slater come to discuss. We can't just say goodbye to those who voted negatively.

Reni Harnden – Agrees w/ John to change the by-laws. Two opposite ends of the spectrum of truth.

Joe Weaver – kudos to Fred. Some people talked about both good and bad – split. He's known so many of those who voted against keeping Deborah. We need to bring them back. What are we doing going forward? We do need to look at the by-laws.

Margie Ives: Need something in the bylaws more definitive. Margie has already reached out to some who voted to recall. There are some who are definitely leaving. Choir members feel the hurt losing Sue. Never heard Julie Turner be so passionate. We have work to do. We need the UCC minister come and can't wait for him. Margie has confidence this church will continue to grow. Has feedback for Pastor Deborah and will discuss with her and Cathy Z.

Anne – Definitely need to look at the bylaws. The handbook was brought up regarding a process for writing people up. The Simpsons were deactivated – how did that happen? What is the process? They were very upset. The communication was dropped - did we totally reach out? We need to reach out to the 52 people who signed the petition indicating we heard them and their voices are important. A UCC minister has offered to come and help guide us and he/she should come ASAP.

Harry – got a little out of hand at times. Bylaws need to be clarified. There needs to be communication. Would like to see the newsletter in print.

Dee – Fred did a good job keeping order. Mediator something we should pursue. Bylaws need to be looked at. Should there be a different procedure to recall a Pastor. Need to review the membership and how someone gets removed.

Cathy Pottle: Agrees with everyone except disagrees we should go to people who voted to recall the pastor with open arms. It was their choice to walk away. Bylaws do need to be looked at again. Hope to never sit at another meeting ever again. Simpsons painful.

Anne Marie – clarified issue with the Simpsons – They were approached by “the group” to sign the petition. CE also approached them to have kids come to confirmation – withdrew due to conflict in the Church. Came to meeting to hear what was happening and found they were no longer considered members.

Ken Gould: Served on Diaconate, felt Simpsons said yes to be inactive. Stewardship also contacted them and they indicated they were not members and were going to another church.

Karen Wilson – Meeting was uncomfortable.

Nancy Murdock – wasn't there but she saw Rev. Slater long before meeting. As far as he knew this is the only church with such a recall process in the bylaws. Agree we need a process in the bylaws about a meeting. Perhaps the recall should be in the contract. Nancy has been here 3 times when the Pastor was going to be removed. With Deborah it has been much more painful and divided. She finds people avoid conflict. It is becoming an uncomfortable place to be.

Beth Hunter – Need to start this process now. Need to in some way to reach out to those on the recall list to move forward. The divisiveness has happened too many times. This is a wake up call. If we don't work this out, it will happen again.

Becky – okay welcoming folks back but not okay saying we're not going to do what we've done in the past. She does not feel the by-laws need changing.

John added that what's in the bylaws does allow a congregational meeting to recall the vote. We are UCC. He feels there are many who don't want to be part of UCC and don't want to be open and affirming.

Karen Wilson – we can't worship as there are so many who are grumbling during this time. Deborah needs to be able to preach.

Cathy states prayers with children “pray for the good people and the bad people here”.

Karen states she has heard people mock those offering up their joys and concerns.

We will have a meeting with Reverend Rankin on Thursday, November 1st @ 7:30

6. Rehabilitation Update – moving forward; 300th moving slow but still moving. Bricks are going to be installed on veteran's day weekend. Nancy will shore up the process. Plan to do the whole thing, but doing 10x10 area around the flagpole. Will enhance with flowers and benches, then will do in phases; planting boxwoods. Goal to order bricks by Friday – could do an expedited delivery. Fund for flowers would like some to purchase sand. Vote made by 8:5 to allow funds for sand be taken from the Garden Fund.

7. Pastor's Report: Reviewed report

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Albert Einstein

“Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is the definition of insanity.”

Author unknown

Lee DeBell contacted me a couple of weeks ago to share his sadness and concern for what I, Liz, and First Parish Church are going through at this time. The current situation hit him hard. I was not surprised by that, because he had been through this before as a member of our church. What struck me was when he shared the following perspective about First Parish Church, which I share with his permission:

“I’ve thought about the negativity issue at FPC a number of times over the years. I’ve come to the conclusion that it is a hard cycle to break. I think it started at least back when (someone) made FPC the centerpiece of his fight against the UCC in NH. It split the church. For most of my adult life, FPC was the only church I really knew. It took until I became active in the Hopkinton church to realize that all churches don’t behave in the same way. I hate to say it, but it was a good thing for Charlotte and I to have had the opportunity to learn that.” Lee DeBell

At the congregational meeting on Sunday (October 21) I left out the following part of my statement. My fear overcame me as I looked out at the sea of faces – many of whom do not attend our worship services on Sunday and many of whom looked at me with such hate. I lost my place and I just went to the end of my statement. The truth is that what I wrote was important. It is important if we are to heal and grow from our mistakes. I commend it to you now:

“The church hired a mediator when Council meetings were so out of control and disrespectful that people were yelling at each other. The mediator taught us that conflict was normal, and that in response to conflict, one could react with healthy or unhealthy behavior. Healthy behavior is talking directly to the person not about the person (Dr. Reynolds called this “straight line” communication). **Healthy behavior** demands that the parties stay in relationship, listening to one another and being open to forgive mistakes. **Unhealthy behavior** is talking about the person rather than to the person (Dr. Reynolds called these “triangles” or “parking lot conversations”). **Unhealthy behavior** consists of leaving the relationship (called ‘cut off’), holding on to being ‘right’ rather than listening and forgiving, blaming and scapegoating rather than taking responsibility. The petition calling to fire me proposes that the mediation didn’t work. What did not happen at the end of the mediation was that I was not fired, which was the only result that some of you wanted – and still want. Mediation is a path to reconciliation, but for some of you, reconciliation was never something you wanted. The “problem” that we have is not about whether I am a ‘good’ pastor or a ‘bad’ pastor. There are many people who think that I am a good pastor and there are those who think that I’m not. That is subjective opinion based on personal experience. The real problem, however, is that we still do not communicate in honest, kind, and direct ways. I have been made aware of many of the complaints that have been collected against me. I am not perfect. I have made mistakes. When these mistakes were brought to my attention I have apologized and tried to make amends.

There were steps that could have been taken to address concerns with my performance. Working within the congregational process that we have, while maintaining covenant with me, people could have gone to Personnel to request a performance improvement plan. Each year I undergo a performance appraisal. This year I opened it up to anyone who was interested in giving me feedback. The majority of the feedback was good and there were a few areas for me to work on. I set up specific goals with the Personnel Board that I will be working on. One goal that the church needs to work on is direct communication. We need to talk to each other more often and more honestly. We need to share our feelings directly and openly when we are hurt by another member of the church community. The system will never change if we do not change our behavior. The problems will never get better if we do not change our behavior.”

Moving Forward:

We need to clearly address the issues that we have as a faith community. Below you will find some ideas that I have come up with.

- * Contact the Committee on Church and Ministry for the Rockingham Association for advice
- * Conference minister
- * Healing Liturgies
- * Conversations/community forums – monthly “what’s happening now?”
- * Reaching out to people “on the fringe”
- * Do more community activities –
- * Do a monthly ‘best breakfast on Saturday morning.
- * GO to the monthly breakfast at the Auburn church (1st and 3rd Saturday of the month)
- * Sunday morning breakfast?
- * Dining for dollars
- * After church speakers
- * Our own Ryan Lehoullier has experience in healthy systems

What ideas do you have?

Peace and all good,
Pastor Deborah

We need to talk to one another – and we need to do it well.

8. Round Table:

Margie needs coats scarfs, mittens etc. Adult male & female.

Otherwise, no new issues.

Closing by Pastor Deborah.